

Reading  
Passages

# The Westward Movement *(cont.)*

## Do It Yourself

People on the frontier had no one to rely upon but themselves. They were separated from relatives and friends living in settled communities. These pioneers had to build their own homes and farms. They did the work themselves as a family unit and learned to be resourceful in meeting their needs. They built homes of logs, sod, or adobe depending on what was available. They treated themselves when sick because doctors were rarely available. Children learned to take responsibility early in life. They grew up quickly, married young, and raised large families.

## Frontier Democracy

New frontiers were usually populated by poor people looking for a fresh start. The leaders they elected to run the government or local military forces were men of action who had not inherited land or wealth. Men like Andrew Jackson and Davy Crockett were elected to public office because they lived just as other pioneers did. Their followers admired the courage and success of men like these.

Leaders had to pay attention to the demands of their constituents if they wanted to be successful. This could be good because people felt an immediate connection with their government. It had negative results too. In many cases it led to legislation against Native Americans, minorities, and foreigners which restricted their lives and liberties.

## The Role of Women

On the frontier, women worked beside their men. They endured the sufferings of the wagon train. They helped with farm work and ran the farm if the man of the family was injured or died. Wives helped build log cabins and sod houses. On occasion, women fought Indians and outlaws. They operated mills, stores, and inns. Although the father was considered the head of the family, the fact that they shared the work tended to give women influence in family decisions and a voice in community life. It is no accident that the first states where women achieved the right to vote were western states like Montana and Wyoming.

## The Enduring Frontier

The frontier has lived on in American culture. In politics and government, leaders try to be inclusive of all segments of society as some frontier communities were. Americans admire individual strength and creative solutions to problems. Americans are still a mobile people, always looking for better opportunities to improve their lives.

1650

1700

1750

1800

1850

1900

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# The Westward Movement

## A Series of Migrations

The Westward movement of the American people across the continent from the Atlantic colonies to the Pacific coast was one of the greatest migrations in human history. Millions of settlers, American-born and immigrants from other lands, moved from the original 13 states across the nation. They eventually reached the Pacific coastline, and some then backtracked to settle in the Great Plains in the center of the country.

## Heading West

The first major movement away from the coastal colonies along the Atlantic Ocean began just as the nation was beginning to rebel against British rule. The Wilderness Road, blazed by Daniel Boone and his companions in 1775, provided a route for pioneers to get through the Appalachian Mountains. Migration into the Northwest Territory and the future midwestern states increased after the Revolutionary War and continued steadily into the 1840s. Settlers also moved southeast into what would become Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida when the Spanish gave up this land to the United States in 1819.

## Manifest Destiny

Many Americans felt the nation had a Manifest Destiny, an obligation to expand and settle the continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

Expansion was seen as an irresistible historical tide. When Texas became an independent nation—separating from Mexico—settlers streamed into this new country and helped it become a state. The rush to Oregon and California began in the 1840s and continued for 20 years. Utah was settled in these years by Mormon emigrants. The last westward push was to the Great Plains, first thought of as useless desert and then drawing many farmers and settlers to its rich soil. By 1890 with the opening of Oklahoma to settlement, the American people had run out of frontiers.

## Frontier Attitudes

The seemingly endless frontier of the nation's first hundred years shaped the ideas and attitudes of Americans in many important ways. People became movers. If things did not work out for a family in one territory, they simply gathered their belongings and moved on in search of richer soil, a nicer climate, or a better opportunity to succeed as farmers, craftsmen, or merchants. The idea of a chance to start over and create a new life was valued by most Americans.

## The Westward Movement

1. What year did the first major movement away from the east take place? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Who lead that movement? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. What else was going on in American history while that movement was taking place? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Many Americans felt the nation had an obligation to expand and settle the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. What name was given to feeling of obligation?  
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3. According to the article, if the American migration westward began at the time of the Revolution, when did it end? How long did it last?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. The seemingly endless supply of land shaped many Americans attitudes about success and failure. According to the article, if things didn't work out for a family in one territory, what did they do?  
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5. Do you think this attitude encouraged or discouraged Americans from taking risks?  
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6. What kind of people did frontier settlers usually elect to office?  
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7. Give two examples of people that frontier settlers elected.  
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8. In two to three sentences, describe the role of women in the west.  
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